

VZCZCXRO5485
RR RUEHBZ RUEH DU RUEHJO RUEHRN
DE RUEHMR #0623/01 3401650
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 061650Z DEC 07
FM AMEMBASSY MASERU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3467
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE
RUEHMR/AMEMBASSY MASERU 3868

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MASERU 000623

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DEPT ALSO FOR AF/S, PM/PPA, AF/RSA;
PASS TO AFRICOM AND ACSS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [MOPS](#) [MCAP](#) [LT](#)

SUBJECT: LESOTHO DEFENCE FORCE COMMANDER: "WE SUPPORT AFRICOM"

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On December 5, Ambassador paid a courtesy call on Lesotho Defense Force (LDF) Commander Lt. General Thuso Motanyane, during which the Commander expressed strong support for the establishment of AFRICOM and lauded growing military relations between the U.S. and Lesotho. The Ambassador also discussed with the Commander the LDF's contributions to Lesotho's national security, domestic humanitarian assistance, and regional peacekeeping operations. Lesotho's helpful stance on AFRICOM can be cultivated and recognized, including through senior-level visits designed to continue the dialogue on the new U.S. military command. In the interim, we will continue this AFRICOM dialogue with the civilian side of the GOL house. END SUMMARY.

Lesotho Supports AFRICOM

¶2. (SBU) As part of his series of introductory courtesy calls, Ambassador met with Lesotho Defense Force (LDF) Commander Lt. General Thuso Motanyane on December 5, accompanied by DCM and Poloff. The Ambassador noted the continuing improvement in U.S.-Lesotho military-to-military ties, including the recent renewal of IMET programs as a result of Lesotho's signing in 2006 of an Article 98 Agreement. Citing the USG's significant increases in aid to Africa through PEPFAR, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, the Global Fund, and other programs, the Ambassador also observed that the establishment of a U.S. Military Command for Africa could lead to an even closer relationship with African countries, including Lesotho, in areas of mutual interest such as security, humanitarian assistance, and development.

¶3. (SBU) General Motanyane concurred with the Ambassador and emphasized that the establishment of AFRICOM was a positive development for fostering improved direct military cooperation with Africa. "Lesotho supports the creation of AFRICOM," stated the general, adding that Lesotho is willing to assist in ensuring AFRICOM's success, as the LDF will benefit from additional cooperation. Motanyane observed that in the Southern African region as a whole, the political issue of U.S. policy towards Zimbabwe was the root of lingering misgivings about the establishment of AFRICOM. He said that "solidarity with (Mugabe)" remained an important factor, intimating that absent the Zimbabwe issue there would be broader SADC support for the new U.S. command.

¶4. (SBU) General Motanyane, responding to DCM's inquiring whether Lesotho had benefited from a September AFRICOM briefing in Warrenton, VA, said that the information brought back by LDF Deputy Commander Brigadier General Mahao, Lesotho's representative, was "extremely useful and highly informative."

He said additional information on AFRICOM offered previously during visits by the Pretoria-based DATT and the Washington-based Director of the African Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS) had also been helpful. The Ambassador described in general terms visits to various African countries by General Ward and other AFRICOM and senior USG leaders to dialogue on the new command, to which Montanyane replied that he would be supportive of a similar visit to Lesotho.

The General LDF Brief

15. (SBU) General Motanyane briefed the Ambassador about the role of the LDF, including protection of the nation's territorial integrity, domestic humanitarian assistance, and contributions to peacekeeping efforts (including a longstanding Military Observer unit in Darfur). The general, pointing out Lesotho's lack of a conventional external threat due to its encirclement by a friendly neighbor (South Africa), stressed that cross border crime posed major problems for Lesotho as a result of porous borders--despite deployment of a full LDF battalion along the border.

16. (SBU) Expanding on the LDF's humanitarian assistance role, Gen Montanyane also spoke about the LDF's role in providing search and rescue services (especially in the Lesotho mountains during snow emergencies) and its assistance to Lesotho's police force during joint security operations. Motanyane also shared that the LDF and the Botswana Defense Force (BDF) had just completed a joint exercise which took place over four weeks in Maseru and in Lesotho's highlands.

Lesotho's Helpful Stance on AFRICOM

17. (SBU) COMMENT: While the Ambassador offered Motanyane

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additional briefings and information on AFRICOM, the Commander made his position clear: Lesotho already supports AFRICOM. While Lesotho is unlikely to make public pronouncements in favor of AFRICOM, in deference to various regional concerns, the Commander's positive disposition to the new U.S. military command can be cultivated and acknowledged through increasingly robust military-to-military ties and senior-level dialogue. Embassy Maseru believes that a visit to Lesotho by senior-level AFRICOM representatives in early 2008 would be the next logical step. In the interim, we will continue this dialogue with the civilian side of the house (the Prime Minister serves as Minister of Defence and National Security, and his Principal Secretary provides de facto civilian oversight of the LDF).

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Civilian GOL support for AFRICOM may be more nuanced, but, after several months to ponder previous USG briefings, the LDF Commander's emphatic support is encouraging. END COMMENT.

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